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THE ARROW

By

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

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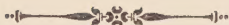
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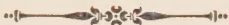
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ONE ACT PLAYS



THE ARROW



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CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



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FIRST EDITION

TO
R. M. S. *CARONIA*

T H E A R R O W

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I

I SUPPOSE the reason why cabin stewards fold them like that, instead of tucking 'em in as bed-clothes are arranged on shore, is that if the ship founders you can get out of your bunk so much quicker. The life preservers are up there, on top of the little wardrobe. The picture of Mr. Boddy-Finch, the resolute-looking man with a moustache, showing how to wear the life waistcoat, is on the panel by the door. Mr. Boddy-Finch's moustache has a glossy twist, probably waxed like that to keep it from getting wet while he's demonstrating his waistcoat. He guarantees that the thing will keep you afloat for forty-eight hours: how can he tell unless

he's tried it? Amusing scene, Mr. Boddy-Finch floating competently in the Mersey while a jury of shipowners on the dock cheer him on toward the forty-eighth hour.

So he was thinking as he got into the berth and carefully snugged himself into the clothes that were folded, not tucked. The detective story slid down beside the pillow. No bed companion is so soothing as a book you don't intend to read. He had realized just now that the strangeness had worn off. This was his first voyage. He had supposed, of course, he would be ill, but he had never felt more at home, physically, in his life. The distemper that had burdened him was of another sort; but now it was gone—gone so quietly and completely that he hardly missed it yet. He only knew that some secretive instinct had brought him early to his bunk, not to sleep, but because there, in that narrow solitude, he could examine the queer delicious mood now pervading him.

The steady drum and quiver of a slow ship finding her own comfortable way through heavy

sea. The little stateroom, which he had to himself, was well down and amidships; the great double crash and rhythm of the engines was already part of his life. A pounding hum, pounding hum, pounding hum. He invented imitative phrases to accompany that cadence. Oh, lyric love, half piston and half crank! Roofed over by the upper berth, shaded from the lamp by the clicking chintz curtain, this was his lair to spy out on the laws of life. He could see his small snug dwelling sink and sway. Marvellous cradling ease, sweet equation of all forces. He studied the pattern of honest bolts in the white iron ceiling. Surely, with reference to himself, they were rigid: yet he saw them rise and dip and swing. The corridor outside was one long creak. There was a dropping sag of his berth as it caved beneath him, then a climbing push as it rose, pressing under his shoulders. He waited, in curious lightness and thrill, to feel the long slow lift, the hanging pause, the beautiful sinking plunge. The downward slope then gently tilted sideways. His

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knees pressed hard against the board, he could see his toothbrush glide across the tumbler. He was incredibly happy in an easy bliss. This primitive cycle of movement seemed a part of the secret rhymes of biology. Now he understood why sailors often feel ill when they reach the dull, flat solidity of earth.

The lull and ecstasy of the sea is what man was meant for. The whole swinging universe takes you up in its arms, and you know both desire and fulfilment. And down below, from far within, like—oh, like things you believed you'd forgotten—that steady, grumbling hum. The first night he was a bit anxious when she rolled: his entrails yawned when she leaned over so heavily on emptiness. But then he had divined something; it is the things that frighten you that are really worth while. Now, when she canted, he did not hold back; he leaned with her, as though eager to come as close as possible to that seethe and hiss along her dripping side. It was the inexpressive faces of stewards and stewardesses that had best fortified him. They

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stood on duty along the exclaiming passages, priests of this white ritual world. Their sallow sexton faces seemed gravely reassuring the congregation that all was calculated, charted, and planned. They flexed and balanced serenely like vicars turning eastward at the appointed clause. He had barely escaped horrifying one of them, his bedroom steward who came in suddenly—the door was open—while he was doing a private caper of triumph at realizing he wasn't ill. He repeated his silly chant, smiling in the berth:

“Wallow in a hollow with a pounding hum,
Pillow on a billow with a pounding hum.
Now the Atlantic
Drives me frantic,
Pounding pounding pounding hum!”

If you ever tell anyone this story, he said to me—long afterward, when he first talked about it—make it very matter-of-fact. I know that some writers have a way of putting things

handsomely, picturesquely, full of ingenious, witty phrases. That's dangerous, because people get a notion that these affairs are only the invention of literary folks.

The first days were very uneasy. He couldn't read, he couldn't bear talking the gay chaff that is legal tender on shipboard, he dreaded the discovery of a mutual friend in Pelham Manor that thrills adjoining deck chairs. He couldn't write, nor imagine concentrating his mind on cards; besides, he was young enough to be alarmed by the warning notice about Professional Gamblers. He'd have enjoyed more deck tennis, but the courts were usually occupied by young engineer-officers and a group of girls whose parents, in desperation, were sending them abroad to school. They were rather noisily true to type and carried with them everywhere a toy phonograph, the size of a candy box. This occult machine, busily rotating dark spirals of jazz, was heard intermittently like a pagan refrain. It uttered such cries as Pan might ejaculate under ether. Long after

the diligent ship's orchestra had couched themselves it chattered, in dark corners of the deck, against the thunder of yeasty sea. Evidently it was hastening its damsels into a concentric *cul de sac* where they would eventually find themselves blocked. There would, perhaps, be the momentary alleviation of a picture in the Sunday paper ("Among the season's interesting brides") after which they would be irretrievable wives and mothers—with friends in Pelham Manor.

He paced the deck endlessly in windy bright September. Weariness is the only drug for that sea unease. At night the mastheads swung solemnly against clear grainy sky. Even the Dipper seemed swinging. Here and there he paused, in a kind of dream, vacantly studying the log of the day's run, pondering on the chart a shoal called the Virgins, or watching, through a brass-rimmed port, cheerful people gossiping in the lounge. He was too shy and too excited to enter into the innocent pastimes of the voyage. Sometimes he went into the smokeroom for a

drink. Brought up in the Prohibition era, acquainted only with raw gin and fusel oils, leperous distilments, he had never before encountered honest ripened Scotch. When that hale benevolent spirit amazed him with its pure warmth, it occurred to him that perhaps there is no reason why the glamour of life should not be taken neat. It need not always be smuggled about in medicine bottles or under false and counterfeit labels. But the smokeroom frightened some essential chastity in his mind. It was full of women smoking and drinking. They wore cheese-coloured silk stockings, provokingly obvious, and their eyes were sportively bright. Perhaps they were gamblers even more professional than those referred to in the sign. One evening, when he had a bad cold, the doctor gave him some phenacetin and aspirin tablets to take with hot toddy. That night he lay stewing in his warm cradle, submerged in a heavy ocean of sleep, rolled in a nothingness so perfect it was almost prenatal. So he told the doctor the next morning, and caught a flash from

that officer's eyes. Both put the phrase aside where it wouldn't get broken, for private meditation. Being diffident, he did not tell the doctor what jolly dreams had swum through the deep green caverns of his swoon. His mind lay on the bottom like a foundered galleon, its treasures corroding in the strong room, while white mermaids . . . No, they weren't mermaids, he said to himself.

But now I know why the steamship companies arrange so many distractions for their passengers.

As nearly as I can make out, his obscure agitations resolved themselves into a certainty that something was going to happen. But he could put no label on this strange apprehensive sentiment. When you can put your feelings into words, they cease to be dangerous. Now you see, he added, why my bunk was the safest place.

He paused. I think he realized that I didn't see, altogether; and I nearly remarked, in the

jocular way an old friend can say things, that if he expected any editor to be interested in this story it was time he got into it something more tangible than phenacetin mermaids. The ladies with cheese-coloured stockings had sounded promising. But somehow, with no notion at all of what he was coming to, I wanted him to work it out in his own way. After all, it's only the very cheap kind of stories that have to be told in a hurry.

Evidently it would be wrong to imagine that his disturbance was unhappy. For I get the impression that, little by little, a secret elation possessed him: on that special evening when he retired early to his berth, he was particularly certain that some blissful meaning lay inside this experience. For suddenly, at the heart of that unsteady clamour, he lay infinitely at peace. The dull crash of those huge pistons was an unerring music; the grave plunging of the ship was perfect rest. He lay trembling with happiness, in what he described (rather oddly) as a kind of piety; a physical piety.

I wanted him to make this a little plainer, but he was rather vague. "I felt, more truly than ever before, a loyalty to the physical principles of the universe. I felt like Walt Whitman."

I decided not to pursue this further, but in a determined effort to explain himself he made another odd remark, which I suppose ought to be put in the record. "One day the chief engineer took me down to see the machinery. But before we went below he made me leave my watch in his cabin. He said that if I had it on me when we went by the dynamos their magnetic power was so strong that it would throw my watch into a kind of trance. It would be interesting as a specimen of polarization, he said, but it wouldn't be a timepiece. Well, it was like that with me. There are some instincts that it's better to leave behind when you go in a ship. I felt polarized."

It appears that he felt himself on the verge of great mental illuminations; but, as one turns away from a too brilliant light, he averted him-

self from the effort of thinking. He took up the detective story, but it lacked its usual soporific virtue. And presently, still wakeful, he slipped on his dressing gown and went for a hot bath. The bathroom, farther down the corridor, would be unoccupied at this hour. On that deck all ports were screwed up, on account of the heavy weather, and it was undeniably stuffy. Several stateroom doors were hooked ajar, for ventilation, and as he passed along. . . .

“I should have told you” (he interrupted himself) “about the day we sailed from New York, a marvellous warm autumn noon, the buoys chiming like lunch bells as we slipped down toward Staten Island. I got down to the ship rather early. After seeing my baggage safely in the stateroom and looking at some parcels that had been sent me—you know that little diary, *My Trip Abroad*, that someone always gives you; I’m sorry to have to say its pages are still blank—I sat in the writing room scribbling some postcards. You must realize

what an extraordinary adventure all this was for me. My Trip Abroad! With a sense of doing something rather dangerous, I went off the pier to mail my cards. I remember the drowsy Saturday sunlight of that wide cobbly space; taxis driving up; the old Fourteenth Street trolleys rumbling along as usual, and in a few hours I should be far away from it all. It was then, returning across the street, that I noticed the head of some goddess or other carved over the piers. I wondered why, but I didn't dally to speculate. I had a naïve fear that the ship might somehow slide off without me—though there was still nearly an hour to sailing time.

“A friend had come down to see me off, and we palavered about this and that: he was an old traveller and was probably amused at my excitement. The deck was thronged with people saying good-bye, and while my friend and I were having our final words, there was a bunch of women near us. My companion may have observed that I was hardly paying attention to our talk. I was noticing a gray dress that had

its back turned toward me. It was an exquisitely attractive thing, a sort of cool silky stuff with crisp little pleats. Its plain simplicity made it admirably piquant. Somehow I had a feeling that anyone who would wear so delicious a costume must be interesting. I can't attempt to describe the garment in technical terms, but it was draped just properly flat behind the shoulders and tactfully snug over the hips. What caught my eye specially was a charming frill that went down the middle, accompanied by a file of buttons and ending in a lively little black bow. I only saw the back of this outfit, which included a bell-shaped gray hat and a dark shingled nape. I noted that its wearer was tall and athletic in carriage, but my friend then recaptured my attention. When he had gone the dress had vanished. A visitor, I supposed; it was obviously the summery kind of thing that would be worn, on a warm day, to go down to say good-bye to someone who was leaving. But several times, in my various considerings, I had remembered it. I thought particularly of

what I called the Spinal Frill and the impudent little twirl of ribbon that ended it. Did or did not anyone who wore that know how enchantingly inciting it was? It must be put there with some intention. But was it the wearer's intention, or only some casual fancy of the dress-maker's? Yet it was there to be admired; and if I had gone to the lady and told her how much I admired it, wouldn't I only have been doing my duty?

"Well, as I started to say, when I went by that partly open door I saw that gray dress hanging in a stateroom. It was on a hanger, its back toward me. It looked rather limp and dejected, but there could be no doubt about the frill and the buttons and the bow.

"I was hurrying, as you do hurry when you go along a public passage in your dressing gown, and it really didn't occur to me until I was comfortably soaking in a deep tub of slanting hot water that I might have noted the number of the room. Then I could probably have found out from the passenger list who she was. But

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even so, I was glad I hadn't. I didn't want to seem to spy on the gray dress: I admired it too much for that; and also, just in the instant I saw it, it looked so emaciated, so helpless, almost as if it were seasick. I couldn't have taken advantage of it. I dallied in my bath for some time; when I returned, all the doors were shut."

II

THE following day there was that subtle change that comes over every Atlantic voyage about three quarters of the way across. Perhaps it happens at the place where the waves are parted, like hair. For on one side you see them rolling in toward America; on the other they move with equal regularity toward England and France. So obviously there must be a place where they turn back to back. The feeling of Europe being near increased the humility of passengers making their maiden voyage; more than ever they shrank from the masterful condescension of those anxious to explain what an intolerable thrill the first sight of Land's End would be. A certain number of English ladies, who had lain mummified and plaided in their chairs, now began to pace the deck like Britannia's daughters. Even one or two French,

hitherto almost buried under the general mass of Anglo-Saxon assertiveness, pricked up and showed a meagre brightness. The young women with the phonograph, if they had been listening, might now have learned how to pronounce Cherbourg. Friendships that had been still a trifle green and hard suddenly ripened and even fell squashily overripe. Champagne popped in the dining saloon; the directors of Messrs. Bass prepared to declare another dividend; there was a fancy-dress ball. A homeward-bound English lecturer hoped that the weather would be clear going up the Chops of the Channel; for then, he said, in the afternoon light you will see the rocks of Cornwall shining like opals. But the weather grew darker and wetter; and with every increase of moisture and gale the British passengers grew ruddier and more keen. Even the breakfast kippers seemed stronger, more pungent, as they approached their native waters; the grapefruit correspondingly pulpier and less fluent. It was borne in upon the Americans that they were now a long

way from home. Hardheaded business men, whose transactions with the smokeroom steward now proved to have had some uses, were showing their wives how to distinguish the half-crown from the florin. It struck them oddly that it might be some time before they would see again the *Detroit Free Press* or the *Boston Transcript*. Thus, in varying manners, came the intuition (which always reaches the American with a peculiar shock) that they were approaching a different world—a world in which they were only too likely to be regarded as spoiled and plunderable children. The young women with the phonograph, subconsciously resenting this, kept the records going prodigiously.

In a mildly expectant way he had kept an eye open for a possible reappearance of the gray frock; but ratiocination persuaded him it was unlikely. For it was not the kind of dress one would wear for dancing—obviously, it was not an evening gown, for it had no hospitable exposures; yet it certainly had looked too flimsy for outdoor appearance in this weather.

Perhaps it was a garment too tenuous ever to be worn at all in Britain, he pondered, as the chill increased. Then came the fancy-dress ball, for which he was enlivened by the Scotch and the enthusiasm of his steward, who admired his tentatively suggested costume of bath towels and curtains. A stewardess pinned him together, loudly praising his originality, although she had seen one just like it almost every voyage for twenty years. He found himself dancing with a charming creature who might even, by her build and colour, have been the gray unknown. He had intended to be a trifle lofty with her, for he doubted whether she was his intellectual equal; but neither the cocktails nor the movement of the ship were conducive to Platonic demeanour. He decided to try her with a hypothetical question.

"If you had a gray dress with long sleeves and a nice little white collar, on what sort of occasion would you wear it?" he asked.

"When I became a grandmother," she replied promptly.

"There was nothing grandmotherly about it," he insisted. "It had a spinal frill and a velvet bow on the bottom."

She laughed so, they had to stop twirling.

"The bottom of what? The skirt?"

"No, at the end of the frill. On the saddle, so to speak—the haunches."

"Haunches!" she cried. "If you were any good as a dancer you'd know they don't have haunches nowadays. D'you see any haunches on me? I'm sorry I didn't get to know you sooner, you're priceless. This music is spinal frill enough for me. Come on, Rudolph, step on it."

So they danced. The second-cabin saloon, tables and chairs removed (she was a one-class ship in her last years), was now called the Italian Garden, a humorous attempt on the part of the steamship architects to persuade passengers they were not at sea. It was used for dancing and Divine Service, two activities so diverse that they cancelled out perfectly. The slippery floor swung gravely; every now and then there was a yell and a merry shuffling as a

deeper roll tilted the crowd out of step and they slid against stanchions and the potted shrubs that symbolized Italy. The musicians, remembering that to-morrow would be the day to take up their collection, braced themselves on their chairs and played valiantly. Like a drumming undertone came the driving tremor of the hull, pounding hum, pounding hum; the ceaseless onward swing of the old vessel, dancing with them, curtseying stiffly to her partner, smashing her wide wet bows into swathes of white darkness. Then the serio-comic yammer of the tune overcame everything, moving pulse and nerves to its rhythm, repeated again and again until it seemed as though the incessant music must cause some actual catabolism in the blood. You remember the song that was the favourite that year:

“When Katie has fits of the vapours
And feels that occasional peeve
That cuts such irrational capers
In the veins of the daughters of Eve,

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There's still one elixir
That surely can fix her,
 Whatever depressions may vex—
 Sitting up late,
 Tête-à-tête,
With the So-called Opposite Sex.”

Before quitting, they went on deck for a gust of fresh air. He wondered vaguely why he had not enjoyed more of this sort of frolic during the previous eight days. This, evidently, was what life was intended for: he was as healthily and gladly weary as a woodchopper. Would she expect him to offer a few modest endearments? It seemed almost discourteous not to, when the whole world was so lyric and propitious. But as they rounded the windbreak into the full dark blast of the night, they collided with one of the phonograph urchins, embracing and embraced with some earnest young squire. They hurried by and stood a few moments alone forward of the deckhouse. There was a clean cold scourge of wind, a bitter sparkle of stars among cloudy scud.

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"Oh," she exclaimed angrily, "will we never be there? I hate it, hate it, this sensual rolling sea."

She cried an embarrassed good-night and was gone. He remembered the head carved on the piers and guessed now who the goddess was.

The next day was the last. At the Purser's office appeared the notice *Heavy Baggage for Plymouth Must Be Ready for Removal by 6 P. M.* The tender bubble of timelessness was pricked. The heaviest baggage of all, the secret awareness of Immensity, was rolled away from the heart. Again the consoling trivialities of earth resumed their sway; though those not debarking until Cherbourg had a sense of reprieve, as of criminals not to die until a day later. The phonograph wenches, regardless of a whole continent of irregular verbs waiting for them, packed the French grammars they had never opened during the voyage, and unaware of plagiarism, made the customary jokes about the Scilly Islands.

He slept late. When he came on deck in mid-morning he could smell England. The wind was still sharp but ingrained with fragrance, motes of earthen savour. Almost with dismay, as they drew in toward narrower seas, he felt the long plunge of the ship soften to a gentler swing. In the afternoon a fiery sunset broke out in the débris of storm they had left astern; the blaze licked along rags of oily cloud, just in time to tinge the first Cornish crags a dull purple. He avoided the English ladies whose voices were rising higher and higher toward their palates, but he forgave them. This was plainly fairy-land, and those returning to it might well grow a little crazed. He saw comic luggers with tawny sails, tumbling in the Channel, like pictures from old books: he imagined them manned by gnomes. He was almost indignant at the calm way the liner pushed on into the evening, regardless of these amazements. He would have liked her to go shouting past these darkening headlands, saluting each jewelled lighthouse with a voice of silver steam.

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It was late when she stole gently up Plymouth Sound and anchored in quiet blackness. There was Stygian solemnity in that silent unknown waterway: the red wink of a beacon and the far lights of the town only increased the strangeness. After days of roll and swing, the strong deck seemed lifeless underfoot, while some spirit level in his brain was still tilting to and fro. The good fabric of the ship was suddenly alien and sorry; stairways and passages and smells that had grown dearly familiar could be left behind without a pang. It was truly a death, things that had had close intimacy and service now lost their meaning forever. Glaring electric lights were hung outside, brightening the dead water; slowly into this brilliance came a tender, ominous as Charon's ferry. He waited anxiously to hear the voices of its crew, the voices of ghosts, the voices of another life. It was called *Sir Richard Grenville*, amusing contrast to the last boat whose name he had noticed in New York, the tug *Francis X. McCafferty*. Then, realizing

that the *Sir Richard* was coming for him, he broke from his spell, hurrying to join the drill of departing passengers.

"Stand close about, ye Stygian set," he thought, remembering Landor, as they crowded together on the small tender, craning upward. The ship loomed over them like an apartment house, the phonograph girls and others, making a night of it before reaching Cherbourg, chirping valediction and rendezvous. As they moved gently away, a curly puff of flame leaped from the ship's funnel. Some accumulation of soot or gases, momentarily ignited, gushed rosy sparks. He never knew whether this was a customary occurrence or an accident, but for an instant it weirdly strengthened the Stygian colour of the scene. It was as though the glory of her burning vitals, now not spent in threshing senseless sea, must ease itself by some escape. In the hush that followed the passengers' squeaks of surprise he heard the toy phonograph, poised on the rail, tinning its ultimatum.

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Later, just as he was getting into the boat train, he thought he saw, far down the platform, a glimpse of the gray dress.

So, by night, he entered into fairyland.

III

WHAT he remembered best of those first days in London was an extraordinary sense of freedom; freedom not merely from external control but also from the uneasy caperings of self. To be in so great a city, unknown and unregarded, was to have the privileged detachment of a god. It was a cleansing and perspective experience, one which few of our gregarious race properly relish. He had no business to transact, no errand to accomplish, no duty to perform. Only to enjoy, to observe, to live in the devotion of the eye. So, in his quiet way, he entered unsuspected into circulation, passing like a well-counterfeited coin. Comedy herself, goddess of that manly island, seemed unaware of him. Occasionally, in the movement of the day, he saw near him others who were evident compatriots, but he felt no impulse to hail and

fraternize. The reticence of that vastly incurious city was an excellent sedative. Once he got out his *My Trip Abroad* album to record some impressions, but desisted after a few lines. "I felt too modest to keep a diary," was his explanation.

Except for the left-hand traffic, which cost him some rapid skipping on street crossings, he encountered no phenomena of surprise. London seemed natural, was exactly what it should be. At first the dusky light led him to believe, every morning, that some fierce downpour was impending; but day after day moved through gossamer tissues and gradations of twilight, even glimmered into cool fawn-coloured sunshine, without the apparently threatened storm. In the arbour'd Bloomsbury squares morning lay mild as yellow wine; smoke of burning leaves sifted into the sweet opaque air. Noon softly thickened into evening; evening kept tryst with night.

His conviction of being in fairyland, when I come to put down what he said, seemed to rest

on very trifling matters. The little hotel where he stayed was round the corner from a post office, and in an alley thereby were big scarlet vans, with horses, and initialled by the King. These ruddy wagons in the dusk, the reliable shape of policemen's helmets and boots, a bishop in the hotel who fell upon his breakfast haddock as though it were a succulent heresy, the grossness of "small" change, and a black-gowned bar lady in a *bodega* who served glasses of sherry with the air of a duchess—these were some of the details he mentioned. His description of men in the subway, sitting in seats with upholstered arms, smoking pipes and wearing silk hats, was, perhaps, to a New Yorker, more convincing suggestion of sorcery. But apparently the essence of London's gramarye was just that there were no shocking surprises. Fairyland should indeed be where all the incongruous fragments of life might fall into place, and things happen beautifully without indignation or the wrench of comedy. London seemed so reasonable, natural, humane, and

polite. If ever you felt any inclination to be lonely or afraid, he said, the mere look of the taxicabs was reassuring. They were so tall and bulky and respectable; they didn't look "fast," their drivers were settled and genteel. He even formed an idea that London fairies, if encountered, would wear very tiny frock coats and feed on the daintiest minuscule sausages; with mustard, of course; and miniature fried fish after the theatre.

The region where Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road transect in an X, like policemen's braces, was his favourite resort. There was no rectitude in the union of these highways, theirs was a gay liaison that had begotten huge families of promiscuous byways and crooked disorderly stepstreets. One parent absorbed in literature, the other gaily theatrical, the young streets had grown up as best they could. In the innumerable bookshops of Charing Cross Road he spent October afternoons; the public lavatory of Piccadilly Circus was near for washing his hands, always necessary

after browsing along second-hand shelves. Then the cafés of Soho were pleasant to retire to, taking with him some volume he had found. No man is lonely while eating spaghetti, for it requires so much attention. He dined early, to visit the pit queues before the theatres opened. There courageous eccentrics sang or juggled or contorted, to coax largesse from the crowd.

It may have been some book he was looking at that sharpened his ear. Outside the bookshop a street piano was grinding, and presently the bathos of the tune, its clapping clanging gusto, became unendurable. It was sad with linked saccharine long drawn out, braying and gulping a fat glutton grief. It had an effect, he said, of sweet spaghetti boiled in tears. It was an air that had been much played on the ship, and for a moment he felt the dingy bookshop float and sway. The verses he had been reading may also have had some effect: poetry, pointed so brutally direct at the personal identity, is only too likely to bring the heart back to itself and its disease

of self-consciousness that is never quite cured. The melody ended and began again. It was a tune concocted specially for dusk, for the hour when filing cases are shut and vanity cases opened; for the dusk, dreadful to solitary men; and he fled down Shaftesbury Avenue to escape. But the deboshed refrain pursued him, it lodged in his fertile cortex like a spore and shot jiggling tendrils along his marrow. The ship, forgotten in these days of fresh experience, returned to his thought. He felt her, rolling the whole pebbled sky and wrinkled sea like a cloak about her wet shoulders; he saw her, still in a dark harbour, gushing a sudden flight of sparks.

I'll wash my hands and go to a show, he thought.

A golden filtration was flowing into the cool dusk of Piccadilly Circus. The imprisoned fire had begun to pace angrily to and fro in the wire cages of advertising signs. Rows of sitting silhouettes, carried smoothly forward on the tops of busses, moved across the pale light.

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Black against the shimmer was the figure of a winged boy, lifted on one foot's tiptoe, gazing downward part in mischief, part in serene calculation. His outstretched bow was lax, his hand still drawn back after loosing the string. The frolic knave, tilted in airy balance, gauged the travel of his dart. His curved wings, tremulous to poise him so, seemed visibly to spread and flatten in the diamond air. Along a slant of shadow, where light was grained with slopes of sunset, sped the unseen flash.

And having, as he thought, washed his hands of the matter; coming blithely upstairs from the basin, he received the skewer full in the breast.

The shock thrust him backward upon another pedestrian. "Careful how you poke that umbrella about," someone said. At first he felt dizzy, and did not know what had happened until a warm tingling drew his attention. The thing had pierced clean through him, a little aside of the middle waistcoat button.

It was prettily opalescent, with tawny gilt feathers. Sparkles from the electric signs played

on the slender wand; the feathered butt projected at least eight inches in front of his midriff. Anxiously reaching behind, he felt that an equal length protruded from his back, ending in a barbed head, dreadfully keen.

His first thought was not one of alarm, though he realized that such a perforation might be serious. "Isn't that just my luck," he reflected, "with my new suit on?" For only that morning he had put on his first British tweeds.

The horns of busses and cars, the roar of traffic, seemed very loud: almost like a crash of applause, the great shout of a sport-loving throng acclaiming this champion shot. He stood there, tottering a little, suddenly concentrated full on himself. It was surprising that there was no pain. A hot prickling and trembling, that was all. Indeed he felt unusually alert, and anxious to avoid attracting attention. People might think it somehow ill-mannered to be transfixed like this in such a public place; an American kind of thing to do. He tried to

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pull out the arrow, both forward and backward, but it would not budge; and tugging at it merely suffused his whole system with eddies of fever. Already several people were looking curiously at him. He hastily gathered his loose overcoat, which had been flapping open when he was hit, over the feathery tail. Unpleasantly conscious of the shaft emerging from his back, and which he could not hide, he set off toward the nearest policeman.

As he crossed the darkening and crowded Circus, edging carefully sideways to avoid spitting anyone with his awkward fixture, it appeared more and more difficult to consult a policeman in this matter. The all-competent, solid, and honourable London bobby seemed the last person to whom one would willingly confess so intimate and absurd a humiliation. And as he was not in pain or weakened, but even strangely exhilarated and feeling a desire to sing, when he stood beside the constable he found it difficult to mention the topic.

Without removing his vigilant gaze from the

traffic, the policeman bent a courteous ear down toward him.

"Which bus for Bedford Square?" he found himself asking.

"Number 38, sir." (Or whatever the number was.)

He had intended to remark, as casually as possible, and with his best English lift of intonation, "I say, constable, I've had a little accident, I wonder if you'd help me." But he had a clear vision of the astounded officer halting all the traffic and a morbid crowd gathering to stare while the stalwart fellow placed a huge foot on his chest and hauled out the shaft. He would have to lie down on the pavement; it would be very painful, he might scream. No, it was too public.

"See here, constable," he said nervously, "has anyone been shooting arrows round here?"

Still watching the stream of vehicles, the policeman took his arm in a powerful grasp and held it kindly but firmly until there was a pause. Then he turned and looked at him carefully.

"Not this early in the evening," he said. "Why, the pubs is only just open. Later on, I dare say, the air is thick with 'em. Now, you take my advice, get along 'ome to Bedford Square and 'ave some black coffee."

"Well, look here!" he cried angrily. "What do you think of that?" He flung open his overcoat to show the thin pearly shaft and the sparkling feathers.

The bobby gazed unmoved. "Button up your coat," he advised. "Someone'll nip that nice watch chain." He escorted him to a neighbouring curb.

"Here's where your bus stops. Now, no more o' your nonsense."

The attentive faces of the throng alarmed the young American into silence. He mounted the omnibus, and sat carefully ajar on the outside of a seat, to prevent the arrow striking anything. But even so, three passengers complained that he was jabbing them, and he was put off before they reached Oxford Street.

IV

RETURNED to his hotel, he evaded the talkative doorman and gained the privacy of his chamber. He took off his outer garments, though with some difficulty, and studied his casualty. The arrow had caused no laceration or visible injury; it had pierced him as cleanly as a needle would enter a pudding. He was aware of a warm tickling, a quickening excitement threaded through some inmost node of his being. The unreasonable missile had traversed some region more intimate even than heart or brain or anything palpable. It seemed to be lodged in his very identity, in some surprised and tender essence he could only describe as Me. He tried to break off the projecting ends of the dart; but when he wrenched and twisted, it proved strangely flexible though apparently so glassy and brittle. He backed against the

window, hooked the barbed point over the sill, and gave a gigantic heave to pull it out. It was immovable, and the effort only left him dizzy and shaken, with flying volleys of anguish that scattered down every frantic nerve. He desisted and sat for a while almost faint while the chair twirled under him and the delicate engine shone and burned and quivered in his vitals. Now it glowed and sparkled with frolic lustre until he was almost proud of so singular a stickpin; now it paled and dwindled until he clutched at his breast to see if it were really there.

He was roused by the dinner gong. Evidently he must make plans to carry on his life with this fantastic inherent. He rang for hot water. When the chambermaid appeared he was standing in his shirt sleeves directly under the light, waiting anxiously to see if she would cry out when she noticed his condition. Chambermaids, he reasoned, are trained to observe anything unusual.

She brought the water, drew the blinds, and turned down the bed without comment. He

stood rotating under the lamp so that she could see him from all angles.

"Chambermaid," he said nervously, "I wonder if you would——"

He hesitated, realizing that someone in the hall might overhear. He closed the door. The maid looked surprised, as his previous conduct in the house had given no suggestion of eccentricity.

He wished he knew her name: it would have made it easier, somehow, to call her Betsy or Maggie.

"My shirt," he said, struggling for an easy familiar tone. "I want you to help me with my shirt."

"It's a pretty pattern, ain't it sir?" she remarked cheerfully. "Oh, you want it mended, don't you. It's torn, what a pity; you must've caught it on a nail."

"Yes, but how about the back?" he asked, turning. "Is that torn too?"

"Oh, Lor', sir, so it is; a nasty little 'ole."

"Is that all?"

"Well, beg pardon, sir. I b'lieve your undervest's tore too, let me—ouch!"

She gave a squeak.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"That's not fair!" she exclaimed angrily, rubbing her plump forearm, evidently puzzled whether this was a practical joke or some new method of beginning a flirtation.

His spirits improved at this evidence of the arrow's invisibility. Keeping at a discreet distance, he suggested that she must have pricked herself on some fastening in her dress.

"All I say is, it's taking a liberty to go shoving pins into people that's trying to be 'elpful."

He pacified her by making a generous offer for the repair of his linen.

"You see," he explained, "the doctor says I don't get enough ventilation. He wants me to have a little loophole in the front and back of my clothes—then there'll always be a current of air. Now if you'll do that for me, I mean cut out the holes and hem them, I'll give you a pound."

“It’ll be blessed draughty with winders cut in your cloes,” she said. “You ain’t seen a London winter. ’Owever, it’s your fun’ral, not mine. A quid? I’ll embroider them ’oles proper for a quid.”

He went down to dinner somewhat fortified. It was the first time he had taken any meal except breakfast in the hotel, and his arrival agitated the head waiter, a small pallid creature troubled by any sudden decision. He had to stand in full publicity while a table was found for him, but none of the diners noticed any oddity in his outline. If they only knew, he thought.

The places against the wall were all occupied; he must take one in the centre of the room; and he discovered that when he sat the butt of the arrow exactly encountered the edge of the board, while the point protruded below the top rail of the open chairback. He had to sit far out, reaching his food at arm’s length; worse still, this brought him dangerously near an adjoining table, where the Bishop was. The head waiter,

perpetually anxious about offending someone or inadvertently making some blunder in sedentary precedences, presently approached to push in his seat for him. The American foresaw the manœuvre just in time, and leaped to his feet; the servant, very much startled, apologized, wondering what error had been committed. He managed to frame some explanation about a sudden cramp in his foot, and prevented a second attempt on the chair by saying that a leg of the table was in the way. But the waiter, with the timorous obstinacy of his kind, hung about zealously. Already a number of eyes were on them, keen with that specially recognizable disapproval which human beings exhibit when anyone behaves queerly in a dining room. Even the Bishop, who was doing wonders with some sort of steaming jam roll, looked halfway round.

“It was really damned embarrassing,” he told me. “By some accidental recommendation I had fallen into a hotel—or *an* hotel, as they called it—that catered solely to English. A

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Continental or American visitor was almost unheard of; most of their patrons, as I noted in the register, had such extravagantly British names as Mrs. Elphin-Elphinstone, The Moated Grange, Monk Hopton, Salop. There was even a Lady in the house, for, turning over the mail on the hall table, I had noted a letter delightfully addressed to Nurse Edwards, care of Lady Smithers; you can hardly guess how unco that seemed to me. As for the Bishop, I don't know that he really was one; I call him so because that was the impression he gave me, but he may have been something even more mysterious, such as a Prebendary. Anyhow, in those first days I had been pleasantly aware of having slipped by good hazard into a pure tissue of England. I had been faced by unfamiliar questions, propounded with sacred solemnity, as when that fool waiter would ask if I wanted thick soup or clear; or my coffee black or white; or sweet or savoury? But I had successfully disguised my excitements, happy just not to be noticed. Now this was all ended. The villainy of

chance had marked me with a stigma sure to make me grotesque, and not even pitiable because it could not be seen. I wondered desperately, as I carefully conveyed my soup in long trajectory toward my mouth, whether a cube of that solid Yorkshire pudding of theirs could be used as a buffer on the point of my arrow, to prevent the waitress from spearing herself. She was an enthusiastic girl and kept rushing toward the narrow space between my chair and the Bishop's with relays of Brussels sprouts or stewed cheese; and each time I had to turn hurriedly and reach for whatever she brought before she could get behind me.

"In this morbid sharpening of my senses, I'm afraid I may have returned a little resentfully the gazes that came my way. The fact is, I was studying the other guests more closely than before. I envied them their perfect adaptation to the scene, their rich normality, their subconscious certainty that what they were doing was regular and right. They could not possibly have guessed that their fresh gobbling

voices, their simultaneous use of knife and fork, the actual food they ate and clothes they wore, were all astounding to me: they were happy, bless them, because they were unaware of themselves, just as I had been; their tender psyche was not spitted like an unchloroformed butterfly. I thought bitterly how mad a man is to come abroad, for it makes him sensible of the strangeness of life instead of merging undissenting into it, which is the only peace. But queerer still: as soon as *my* behaviour became indecorously odd, as it now unavoidably was, they seemed more cordial. I suppose that in some way the report had gone round that I was an American; well, as long as my demeanour was indistinct from that of any other well-behaved young man, they were gently disappointed; but when I showed signs of strangeness it satisfied some vague notion in their minds. And in the oblique profile of the Bishop, as I glanced over my shoulder, I could divine the enigmatic radiation of a man who is about to say something. I watched him apprehensively, and

when he pushed his chair back, I got hastily to my feet. He seemed surprised at what he can only have thought an excessive courtesy; but he had his cup in his hand and asked me, most charmingly, if he might take coffee at my table.

“I may as well admit that he captivated me at once. I had thought, watching him a few times at breakfast, that there was a certain ludicrous discrepancy between his clean-shaven austerity and the extreme gusto with which he approached his food and his morning *Times*. I could imagine him removing from his mind things in the paper that disagreed with him just as efficiently as he set aside bones in his haddock. But, after all, I don’t know why a bishop shouldn’t enjoy his meals as heartily as anyone else. And here he was, the star boarder, in pure goodness of heart taking pains to be gracious to a young alien. His clear gray eyes were so magnificently direct, it seemed incredible he should not see my gruesome predicament. In pursuit of theological niceties he must have accepted without question many para-

doxes just as puzzling as my arrow; but he showed no sign. I yearned to confess my trouble. Who better than a bishop should be able to understand and console my difficulty? But, curiously, I saw in him the same ruddy benign solidity, the same aversion from surprise that had made it difficult to appeal to the policeman. I suspected that he was being kind to me on the tacit understanding that I would behave more or less as he expected me to; and I made a resolute attempt to hide my distress. I tucked my napkin over the hole in my waistcoat and welcomed him as courteously as possible.

“‘I trust you won’t think I’m intruding,’ he said, ‘but I heard you were an American going up to Oxford, and as an old Oxonian myself I wanted to wish you luck. I suppose you are a Rhodes Scholar?’

“I assented.

“‘I met a most charming Rhodes Scholar once, also from Ohio,’ he continued. (I wish you could have heard his genial pronunciation of the

word, equally accenting all three syllables.)
'A fine, manly fellow. It has been an excellent thing for the old varsity to have so many young Americans; you seem to bring us a freshness of outlook, vigorous high spirits that we need.'

"I feared inwardly that he must be disappointed in me as an example of high spirits.

"'I suppose you have already graduated from some American university,' he said. 'I wonder if it could be Princetown? I had a friendly invitation from there at one time, to lecture in the Divinity School. No? Having taken a degree already makes your men a little more mature in some ways than our undergraduates.'

"I explained that I was twenty-two. I did not insist how considerable an age it then seemed.

"'Which college are you going to at Oxford?' he asked.

"'St. John's.'

"'Ah, quite one of the best. You will be very happy there. Trinity was my shop, but I often used to go to John's for meetings of the Archery

Club. Perhaps you didn't know that there's great enthusiasm at St. John's about their historic Archery Club. They have marvellous lunches and then go out in the garden to shoot with bows and arrows. Sometimes, when the lunch has been excessive, it's a bit dangerous, arrows flying round all over the place. But it's quite the leading club at John's; it would be an amusing experience for you if you were elected.'

"I was far too depressed to enter with much enthusiasm into the notion of the Archery Club, or tell him that I would make a singularly appropriate member. I was realizing that, of course, my whole Oxford career, so eagerly anticipated, was completely blighted. Undergraduates, more than any others, are children of conformity, and anyone so cruelly unique must necessarily be a pariah. I mumbled doleful replies while he chatted kindly on. But the arrow fretted me with stealthy fire, and the cleric's amiable regard became rather pebbly. His was an established mind, neatly reticulated into a seemly satisfying world; the slightest

whisper of my furious fancies would have pained him unspeakably. The obvious necessity for concealing everything I was really thinking about made me gloomy and solemn.

“‘I’m glad you approach your studies in a serious spirit,’ he said finally. ‘You won’t be wasting your time in mere pranks.’

“He finished his coffee and rose. Sunk in private misery, I forgot to rise with him. He turned to pick up his napkin from the next table, and standing so backed directly on my naked barb. It reached him blithely in the postern, honouring him in the breech as Hamlet might have said; that chub elastic region certainly had not been so invaded since he was an urchin at school. At the moment I was absently finishing my savoury; when I heard him leap and yell I turned aghast; he, seeing me fork in hand, can only have thought I had wantonly prodded him in sheer overplus of savagery. The head waiter came running; the other guests stared to see the admired prelate distractedly chafing his postremity and glaring

excommunication. 'Let me explain,' I cried wildly, ready to confess all and cast myself on his mercy; but the very phrase condemned me. I will not elaborate the dreadful scene. I still remember the face of the head waiter. If it had been Mrs. Elphin-Elphinstone herself who had been impaled, he could not have been more scandalized. There was only one decency possible. I packed, paid my bill, called a taxi, and sought another lodging. It occurred to me, in the cab, that perhaps I should have sent for Nurse Edwards, care of Lady Smithers, and offered to pay for a compress or tourniquet. But a tourniquet would have been awkward."

A LONG and restless night gave ample opportunity for meditation. Sleep was difficult: he had to lie accurately on edge, and could not turn over on the other side without first getting out of bed. If he dozed into peaceful oblivion some uncanny movement would jar the weapon and bring him back to his affliction. There it was, fantastic, inextricable, struck through the very pulse of his consciousness. Besides being infernally uncomfortable, the thing suggested further privations. A life of celibacy, for instance—a thought distasteful to young men. If it had not been for a bottle of brandy in his luggage he would hardly have slept at all; but he discovered that generous potations seemed to dull the point of the shaft and make it smaller. A lukewarm consolation crept into his mind: perhaps everyone else was also concealing some equally embarrassing anguish—a secret

that perhaps did not take the same awkward shape, but was just as disturbing.

The following day the arrow baffled him by showing itself strangely variable. As he slunk shamefully from his lodging it seemed as big as a harpoon; he hailed a taxi, to avoid any possible collision, and went to the Express Company. There, after a difficult time standing sideways in the line of people pressing vigorously toward the teller's grill, he managed to cash a check. He was leaving, intending to visit an American doctor, when he was greeted by an old crony who came boisterously forward. He dodged behind a pillar and extended his hand warily. His friend, thinking this a drollery of some sort, laughed gaily and peered round the column. "What's on your chest?" he cried, noting the furtive behaviour. The sufferer's hand flew to his wishbone, but the remark was purely accidental, for the encumbrance had now shrunk to such modest size that he could lap his overcoat over the feathery butt and guard the rearward point by covering it with

one gloved hand behind his back. Encouraged, he postponed medical consultation and, as his friend would not be shaken off, they lunched together. For a couple of hours, when he privily rummaged in his bosom, he could have sworn there was nothing there. Yet it returned again later, pricking him with impossible suggestions, so that he had to stand apart round less frequented street corners, struggling to master the glittering thing by strong force of will; or else hire a taxi and ride expensively secure until it shrank to manageable dimension.

But, without committing himself in any way, he had learned from his friend one fact which promised to be helpful. At the American Embassy there was a young man employed who was, as the customary tautology has it, a fraternity brother of theirs. This means that the young official was bound, by some juvenile severities of their Greek-letter union, to mutual succour in distress. So in one of the ante-rooms of the Embassy's business office we see the stricken one mysteriously consulting his fellow

Hellenist. There was an exchange of passwords as Greek met Greek, though not in any accent approvable by Liddell and Scott; and the visitor displayed, for identification, a generous sheaf of testimonials from Middle-Western pastors and pedagogues. With these muniments Rhodes Scholars are always plentifully provided. The attaché, who, with spats and cut-away and a conviction that no gentleman sallies abroad without a cane, had also put on a certain fatigue of the homeland simplicities, glanced hastily through the assurances that his brother was of modest and winning nature, a fine influence in the Christian life of the community, a brilliant scholar, a leader of glee clubs, and a triple-threat halfback. He noticed that, in spite of these resources, the caller looked somewhat haggard, exhaled a faint vapour of cognac, and had a curious habit of standing averted, holding one arm doubled back behind his shoulders. He prepared himself with several irrefutable reasons why the Ambassador was not at liberty.

“See here,” said the caller, in whom after several days of wretchedness the sentiment of anger was now uttermost, “is this the place to file a complaint against the British Government?”

The young diplomat was fully aware that complaints against the British, or any other government, were rarely efficacious. And his promotion, slow at best, depended largely on his finesse in preventing the channels of communication from being choked with the assorted woes of American travellers. Accordingly he had framed a polite theorem for the various emergencies of his bureau, to the effect that the United States Government, though undoubtedly a sovereign power, cannot safeguard its citizens against all the miscellaneous vexations of life. This apothegm, though frequently in use, he was always able to utter as if freshly inspired for the immediate instance. It was ready to his lips, but something in the manner of his inquirer led him to a more comradely candour.

"Why, yes," he said, "if necessary. But I doubt if it'll do much good. And it depends on the nature of the complaint. If it's an income tax——"

"It's no use my trying to explain. You wouldn't believe me. I've been to a doctor and all he can suggest is that it's a case of *hyperaesthesia sagittaria*. He's delighted about it, but then he doesn't have to live with it."

"You'll pardon me, I'm sure," said the attaché, "but if you can state the nature of the grievance——"

"I've drawn up a document about the whole affair," said the plaintiff, producing a manuscript. "Now, remember, this is entirely confidential except as regards official channels. But it's the only recourse I have. If you'll run your eye over this——"

The clerk read:

WHEREAS ———, a citizen of the United States of America, 22 years of age, residing temporarily at 18, Torrington Square, London, desires to make complaint against H. M. Government as follows:

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Whereas on the 3rd day of October instant, about the hour of five P. M., the said —, on his lawful occasions and peaceably pursuing his own concerns, was walking through Piccadilly Circus, when a missile nearest describable as an arrow, projected by person or persons unknown, did so strike and transfix the body and soul of said — that he has thereafter gone in peril of his life and wits. And whereas the said arrow is not by any ascertainable means removable from the body of the plaintiff, and whereas it has afflicted him grievously in mind, body, and estate, subjecting him to extreme humiliations and necessitating medical treatment for a highly nervous and excited condition and repeated hire of motor taxicabs to prevent embarrassing H. M. subjects on the sidewalks; and whereas the petitioner feels his future career and tranquillity gravely compromised by this affliction, he respectfully submits that it is the plain duty of H. M. Government, acting through the London County Council or any other lawful body, to keep the region of Piccadilly Circus free of such random projectiles and that neglect of such precautions has resulted in a delict upon the person of a citizen of the United States.

Your petitioner therefore prays that damages be awarded commensurate with the offence, and that the American Ambassador in London be instructed to make representations to that end to the officers of H. M. Government.

“But I don’t see any arrow,” objected the fraternity brother.

“Hush! Not so loud!” said the petitioner, looking round nervously at several other

citizens who were waiting their turn to make complaints. He leaned across the counter and whispered hoarsely.

The clerk seemed a little shocked. He read the document again and privately concluded that the Ohio chapters of Nu Nu Phi ought to be more careful in their elections. But one business of an embassy is to allow Time to anoint its healing lotion upon human abrasions, and he fell back on sound governmental principles.

"Well," he said, "I'll put this through the proper routine. But don't expect questions to be asked about it in Parliament next week. First it'll have to go before some Congressional committee in Washington, I suppose, and when they see the word *arrow* they'll probably refer it to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Also, it must pass through our legal department here, to be put in correct form."

But he was almost ashamed of his flippancy when he saw the exalted earnestness of the other man.

"Did you ever have a secret so important,"

asked the caller, "that no one could possibly be told, and yet everyone knew it anyhow?"

"Why, sure; that's what embassies are for, to deny that sort of thing." As he spoke he thought anxiously of his own secrecies: private experiments with a monocle that he had never dared wear publicly, and that it was near closing time and he had an engagement to meet a young lady for tea at Rumpelmayer's.

"Put your hand here," the caller said, opening his overcoat.

The attaché did as directed. He felt a sharp sting and a warm hypodermic sparkle snaked up his arm. For an instant he was giddy, the office behind him with its terraced filing cases seemed to rock and grow dim. He clung to the counter as to the bulwark of a ship. He heard music faintly played, the light chatter of voices, and in a brightness soft as candleshine he saw the face of the damsel at Rumpelmayer's.

He steadied himself, fixing his mind on the tight-lipped engraving of George Washington.

“Really, you know . . . sorcery . . . I’m not sure that this comes under the scope of this office.”

The impatience of several ladies waiting attention began to be audible.

“Do what you can,” said the plaintiff, and repeated the covenant of their Greek-letter federation. He left, making a wide zigzag to give the other clients a safe offing. The attaché, concealing behind the counter a hasty glance at his wrist watch, assigned two elderly ladies to a confrère and selected the younger one for himself. The only consolation in this job, he reflected, was that perplexity did sometimes descend upon travelling citizens who were really attractive; but even so, not as alluring as the graceful creature who would soon be in St. James’s Street, taking her tea and pastry with only one hand.

VI

THE plaintiff in Torrington Square was surprised to receive, a few days later, a letter from the American Embassy. It was embossed with the official seal of the United States, which he was startled to observe consisted of an eagle with excessively straddled legs one of which held a cluster of arrows and the other a foliage that he took to be an olive bough. Arrows, he thought ironically, he could supply for himself; the message, written in the attaché's own hand, was evidently intended to be of the nature of the olive branch. It was informal and cordial.

"Your statement," he read, "is having due attention. I have been thinking about the matter and, speaking as a friend and brother in old Nunu, I believe perhaps you take it too seriously. I think that when you get up to Oxford the pleasant surroundings of that peaceful

place will soon remedy the condition; in the meantime I suggest that you enjoy some innocent diversion. Nothing is more entertaining than a professional Anglo-American Hands Across the Sea meeting, so I am enclosing a ticket to the annual luncheon of the Atlantic Harmony. You will find this well worth attending, Lord Aliquot is to take the chair and Admiral Stripes, U. S. N., will be one of the speakers. Yours cordially."

The date set for the luncheon was the day before he would leave for Oxford. He decided to go.

The attaché was right: one of those meetings at which the two chief branches of the Anglo-Saxon race convene to confess their mutual esteem is indeed fruitful study for the pensive. The Atlantic Harmony lunched in the ballroom of a huge hotel; behind the high table the banners of both nations were draped and blended; an orchestra in the gallery burst into traditional airs; cocktails began and champagne followed. Dishes sacred to England and Amer-

ica were on the menu, and judging by the notable bulk of most of the ladies, there was no danger of the race perishing of starvation. It was an orgy of friendly sentiment; for the time being the Atlantic Ocean seemed a mere trickle; one had to remind one's self that only the fortunately high rate of steamship fares prevented two mutually infatuated populations from putting their affections to the proof *en masse*. Even a man with a serious gravamen pending against the British Government could not resist the general infection of good will. He waited in the lobby until the crowd had gone in, which made it possible to reach his seat without spiking anyone; and by the time the wine had made a few circulations he was in excellent humour. Contemplating the worthy people who are drawn by irresistible magnetism to affairs of this sort, he began to wonder what was the law forbidding Anglo-American friendship to be endorsed by the young and slender. The ladies were mostly silvery and, in the case of his immediate neighbours, deaf; and the gentlemen

solid; but their enthusiasm was terrific. References by Lord Aliquot to the Mother Country, cousins, blood thicker than water, the critical days of 1917, the language of Shakespeare, Magna Charta, Your Great President, were received with instantaneous crashes of applause. Admiral Stripes, forgetting the extreme efficiency of the submarine cables, very nearly made Lord Aliquot a present of the United States Navy. Lord Aliquot, after humorously remarking that he himself had made the supreme sacrifice for Anglo-American union by marrying an American wife, insisted that nothing could go seriously wrong between two nations nurtured in the same sense of fair play and reverence for pure womanhood. His Lordship, an old hand at these affairs, took care to end each paragraph with an obvious bait for applause. This gave him time to be quite sure that the next one would not contain anything regrettable. An American minister, chaplain of the Harmony, offered a prayer for all branches of the English-Speaking Peoples,

on whom heavier than elsewhere rests the great burden of human liberty. If any Frenchman had been taken, manacled, into the room, and compelled to listen to the speeches, he would have ended in convulsions. In short, it was one of those occasions, familiar to statesmen, that cannot possibly do any harm and offer a hard-working nonconformist parson a free meal and an opportunity to address the Deity in public. Meanwhile, the Swiss and German waiters scoured about busily, the champagne flowed, and when "Dixie" was played, many who had never seen a cotton field scrambled up and shouted in pure hysteria.

During the halloo that followed "Dixie" he rose and cheered with the rest. Then he saw, sitting opposite across the large round table, a girl who had been hidden from him by a bushy centrepiece of flowers. She was dark, with close-cropped hair; a little absent-looking, as though she did not take this luncheon very seriously; she had a cloak thrown over her shoulders. He was just raising his glass, with a vague intention

of toasting the universe at large, when he caught her gaze. They studied each other solemnly, as becomes strangers crossing unexpectedly in so large a waste. Then, in the flush of the moment, he smiled and lifted his glass. She reached for hers, and they drank, look to look. Then, a little embarrassed, he sat down.

But something in her face or gesture fretted him, bothered him as does a cut-off telephone call; he was waiting and wondering. He tried to get another glimpse of her, but the floral piece was impenetrable. There was no time to lose: one of the neighbouring matrons was asking him what was that music which had just been played, and the chairman was already hammering for silence. He stood up again for one more look, and saw that the man on her left, elevated by champagne and the gallant megalomania of the occasion, was still erect and vocal. He also saw how far back she sat from the table. Her hand, stretched out at arm's length, still lingered on the wine glass stem.

He ran round to her side of the table, and seized the joyful gentleman. "Quick!" he said. "They want us to change places. Makes it more sociable!" The other gaily assented, and took his place between the two dowagers; nor did he ever discover their infirmity.

"Aren't you warm with that cloak on?" he asked. "Can I take it off for you?"

Her quick little movement of alarm, drawing the wrap closer round her, showed him he had not made a mistake. But he did not pause to wonder at his certainty. Shy as he had always been, now it was as though he looked at a woman for the first time, and saw not the strange capricious nymph of legend but the appealing creature of warmth and trouble, ridiculous as himself. Perhaps it was the grotesque pangs of the previous days that had tutored him. Terror of other human beings had vanished; his blemish was not shameful but something to be proud of; and his next words were divinely inspired—they were brief but exactly right.

"You darling," he said.

The clapping that followed was probably intended for the Viscount Aliquot, but it came too pat to be ignored.

"And that's the first thing that's been said here that was really worth applause," he added.

She looked at him steadily, something in her eyes that might once have been terror changing into amusement; and then returned her gaze to Lord Aliquot, who seemed very far away, gesticulating at the other end of the great room. "You mustn't talk while people are whispering," she said.

She couldn't possibly have been any different, he thought triumphantly. He had a strong conviction that those dark eyebrows, the delightful soft stubble at the base of her boyish neck, that wistfully shortened upper lip had always been growing and curving like that just intentionally for him. He was waiting hopefully (as was Lord Aliquot) for Lord Aliquot to be interrupted by another round of applause.

"Of course the proper thing to say," he murmured, "would be, Haven't we met before somewhere? But it's more important to know, When are we going to meet again?"

"We haven't parted yet."

"Splendid. But are you going to listen to me or to the speeches?"

"Evidently I can't do both."

"Well, there'll be a National Anthem soon; I can feel it coming. They'll all stand up, and we can slip away. Besides, it always embarrasses me to sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' before strangers. Let's go and have tea somewhere."

"But we haven't finished lunch yet."

"Don't let's waste time. I've got to go to Oxford to-morrow. By the way, if you had a gray dress with a little frill down the back, on what sorts of occasions would you wear it?"

"Why, right here; but I can't, it's got a hole in it."

He leaned toward her, to whisper something, and the ends of their arrows touched. There

was a clear puff of sparkling brightness, like two highly charged wires making contact. Some weary guests at the speakers' table brisked up and felt their cravats, believing the time for the flashlight pictures had come. Lord Aliquot, taking it for some sort of signal, called the company to their feet for the American Anthem.

"Hurry! if we wait they'll get beyond the words they know, then everyone will spot us beating it."

They reached the door before anyone except Lord Aliquot had got beyond "What so proudly we hailed."

"What so proudly we hailed," he said, as the words pursued them into the lobby. "That suggests taxies. Let's grab one."

VII

“ANTHEM? Nonsense, we’ve just had one.”

But then they saw the old fellow meant a hansom. There it was, drawn up by the——

“Bet you don’t know how they spell curb over here,” he said as they climbed in. “They spell it K, E, R, B. You know it’s the first time I ever rode in one of these things. Who’s that talking to us from the sky?”

They looked up and saw a curious portrait floating upside down above them. It was framed in a little black square, like an old Flemish master—the colour of Tudor brick grizzled with lichen. It proved to be the face of the lisping cabby.

“Oh, anywhere where one does drive in London.”

“I want to see the Serpentine,” she said.
“I’m always reading about it.”

"Very good, mith." The brick portrait floated a moment genially and then said with bronchial jocularly, "Adam and Eve and the Therpentine." They laughed—the sudden perfect laughter of those overtaken unawares by the excellence of the merry-making world. The cab tilted, jingled, swayed off, rolling lightly like a canoe.

"Of course this is simply magic. Things just don't happen like this," he said as they settled themselves. "Are you comfortable? If I put my arm round you, it would prevent the point of yours from punching into the seat. You see, I can sit sort of diagonal, and then if you slide over this way——"

"It gives me a spinal frill when it touches anything," she admitted.

He looked at her amazed.

"Yes, that girl on the ship told me what you said. She was my roommate."

"Why didn't I ever see you on board?"

"You did, but you didn't look at me."

"I'll make up for it now."

"Besides, I was ill. Not just seasick ill, ill in my mind. Don't let me go in a ship again—it's too elemental."

The tips of the two arrows touched, and again there was a little fizzing flash. Just the thing for lighting cigarettes, they found, and practised it.

"As a matter of fact I have two arms," he added presently.

"The dusk comes early in London," she said.

"You darling," he repeated, saying it with the accent that can only be uttered in a hansom.

"I think mine's loose," she said. "It seems to waggle a little."

"Mine doesn't bother me a bit as long as we sit like this."

"I thought I was mad."

"So did I. Now I know it. I went to an astrologer, one of those fellows in a dressing gown on Oxford Street. He asked me my birthday, December 21st. He said that I came just

between two signs of the Zodiac, Sagittarius and the Goat. I guess I'm both of them at once."

Rocking lightly, tingling like a tray of highballs, the cab jingled. Music came from somewhere—a street piano perhaps—the same old tune, drifting sadly on waves of soft smoky air; a mendicant melody with no visible means of support. They called to the cabby to follow it, they pursued the vagrant chords down unknown ways of dusk, while London behind them muted its rhythm to a pounding hum. At last they found the minstrel, pulled up beside him, and startled him by their new method of lighting cigarettes.

"I'm still not quite sure of the difference between a half-crown and a florin," he said.

"Then give him both."

When they reached the Serpentine it was too dark to appreciate it.

"Let's bruise it with our heel," she said. "I mean, let's go somewhere. Let's go home, wherever that is."

"Where was it we first met?" He searched his memory. "Long ago. Yes, at that hotel. We'll go back there to tea."

"Is it all right to feel a bit queer in a hansom cab? I mean, almost as though you were on board a ship? I guess I'm worried about my arrow. It doesn't seem to fit as well as it did. My precious arrow. . . ."

His also was trembling strangely. Two lonelinesses must always feel disconcerted when they encounter.

"Darling, darling"; and as she came close into his arms with a queer shudder, the two sparkling darts slipped quietly to the back of the seat.

In the palm room of that hotel is a ceiling of painted mythology. While you wait for anyone who may be coming to have tea with you, you can examine a series of episodes gracefully conjectured from the life of a famous family. First there is Aphrodite, rising alluringly from the foam of a blue sea whose crumbling surf is

pink with sunrise. Then there is the marriage, if one calls it so, of Aphrodite and Hephæstus—Vulcan, if you prefer, the fellow the Swedes name their matches for. It was a queer marriage for so handsome a goddess when Aphrodite became the first Mrs. Smith; but handsome women so often choose odd-looking men. Then there's their small boy, Eros, with the toy bow and arrows his father made for him, asking Vulcan to sharpen the darts for him; and his father, busy about thunderbolts, replying that the toys are quite sharp enough. In the last scene Eros, grown to a braw lad-die, is trying a chance shot at Psyche. You generally have plenty of time to study all four scenes.

In that hour, late for tea and early for dinner, the palm room was comfortably quiet. The hotel, after the fitful fever of the Atlantic Harmony, slept well. The occasional clink of a teaspoon or a thicker waft of cigarette smoke rising through foliage gave the only trace of what various big game lurked in that jungle.

An orchestra groaned softly somewhere far away. It was all so extremely hotel-like, they might just as well have still been on board a ship.

"By the way," he said, "you haven't told me how you happened to go to that lunch."

"Why, it was a young man at the Embassy. He gave me a ticket when I went there to complain about Piccadilly Circus. I mean, about arrows flying round like that. It shouldn't be allowed."

It was at this moment that he noticed the ceiling. It interested him so that he stood up and cricked his neck to see it accurately.

"Have you had all the tea you need? I've got an idea. There's an errand we ought to do." He carefully picked up the arrows which he had laid under his chair.

The hansom was outside.

"Why, it's still waiting!" she cried. "'What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.'"

"He must have come back for us. I guess he knows the symptoms."

"The blessed old thing."

"And for all he knew, he might have had to wait till to-morrow."

She made no reply to this, but skipped lightly in. The charioteer leaned indulgently downward, his head on one side, like a disillusioned old centaur looking kindly upon the pranks of a couple of young demigods.

"Well, guvner, which way thith time? 'Amp-ththead 'eath?"

"We want to go and look at a statue."

"Lord love a duck, guvner, the gallerieth ith clothed."

"The statue in Piccadilly Circus. What do they call it?"

"'Im? Why that'th Cupid."

They drew up in a side street and crossed the crowded space on foot. Happy as he was, quit of the infernal pang, once more oblivious of terror, mortal loneliness, and dismay, yet the cicatrix of the arrow was still tender. For an

instant, as she pressed close beside him, he realized that none of these exquisite moments could be lived again.

The same bobby was directing the traffic; the same imprisoned fires paced like tigers on the rooftops. The winged boy, tiptoe in jaunty malice, was black against the emerald sky. He pointed to the dainty silhouette of the bow.

"A circus is where one would expect to find sharpshooters," she said.

He climbed past the flower girls, who were arranging their stock of evening boutonnieres, and laid the two shining arrows at the base of the frolic statue.

"Here, you dropped something," he said to Eros.

The flower sellers, shrewdest critics of romance in the most romantic city in the world, held out their nosegays. But the two did not see.

"Well, we're only young once," he said.

‘But there’s two of us. That makes us young twice.’

“I suppose at least we ought to know each other’s names.”

“It’s so much nicer not to.”

“Much. Let’s be just P and Q.”

“P for Psyche?”

“And Q for Cupid.”

They walked back to where the cab was waiting.

“Do we have to mind them?” she asked.

“What?”

“Our P’s and Q’s.”

“Hop in, you adorable idiot.”

“Where to, guvner?”

“Wherever you please.”

“Hullo, it’s the same hotel. He thinks we’re staying here.”

“Maybe he’s right.”

“But we haven’t any baggage. Not even our arrows.”

“I can fix that.”

“Sorry, guvner, but I’m off. The mare’th

THE ARROW

earned 'er tea. Will you be goin' out agin to-night?"

"What are you going to tell him?" she asked in sudden panic.

"Nothing. I want to hear you do it."

How delicious her voice was:

"You needn't wait."



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Morley, Christopher, 1890-
1957.
The arrow

